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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a project designed to provide an objectively measured indication of the quality of student writing in one school district, this paper presents analyses of the syntactic complexity of the argumentative and narrative writing of more than 500 seventh and eighth grade students and of the mechanical errors found in that writing. Various sections of the paper contain (1) a description of the student sample and the study methodology; (2) detailed analyses of the syntactic complexity of the writing as measured by T-unit analysis; (3) an analysis of the basic writing skills of the students as measured by a count of errors in spelling, punctuation, pronoun usage, adverb usage, modifier usage, parallel construction, and subject-verb agreement; (4) an account of a rhetorical analysis of a subsample of the student writing; (5) a report on the correlations found between the various sets of scores; and (6) a discussion of the results of the analyses, which revealed extraordinarily high syntactic complexity scores for the students, especially in the argumentative mode, and extremely low levels of mechanical errors. Appendixes contain copies of scoring sheets and student essays. (FL)

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THE CARLETON WRITING PROJECT, PART I

The Writing Abilities of a Selected Sample of Grade 7 and 8 Students

FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of Part I of the Carleton Writing Project was to provide the Board with an objectively measured indication of the quality of the writing of a selected sample of students in Grades 7 and 8. In all, four measures of writing ability were used. The first two were the concern of the students' own teachers and of the Board officers working on the holistic scoring project. The results of that project have already been presented in a report written by Mr. Robert G. O'Riordan, a Language Arts Consultant for the Board. This report is concerned with the other two measures: an analysis of the syntactic maturity of the papers in the sample, as measured by T-Unit analysis, and a count of the incidence of certain kinds of mechanical errors, undertaken by means of an instrument devised for this purpose. The results of both sets of analyses are reported within. In addition, we report on the correlations between these sets of scores.

Description of the Sample

The number of papers made available to us by the Board was approximately 1,000, consisting of one paper on a narrative topic and one on the topic "Should or should not young teenagers be punished physically," written by some 500 students in Grade 7 and 8 classes. As is noted in Mr. O'Riordan's report, the student papers were volunteered by their teachers for this project, a fact which makes any extrapolation to the whole Grade 7 and 8 population invalid.

For the T-Unit Analysis and Error Count, budgetary limitations forced us to limit the number of papers described to c. 700, and since an increasing amount of evidence shows that T-Unit Analysis is more valid for expository and argumentative writing (Crowhurst and Piché, 1979), all the argumentative papers were subjected to T-Unit analysis, but only a 40% random sample of the narrative papers.

The actual number of papers analyzed was 691, broken down as follows:

Grade 7 Narrative:	Grade 7 Argument:	Grade 8 Narrative:	Grade 8 Argument:
108	254	86	243

The other pertinent statistics for this group of papers are the in-school mark (out of 60), the holistic score (out of 40), both of which were furnished by the Board, the total number of words and the total number of sentences:

DESCRIPTOR:	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
In-School Mark (/60)				
Mean:	42.93	42.04	38.98	39.46
Range:	26-55	22-55	16-58	12-47
Holistic Score (/40)				
Mean:	24.14	23.57	24.6	25.18
Range:	12-35	8-36	8-35	13-36
No. of Words				
Mean:	328.76	212.56	328.40	248.75
Minimum:	139	68	153	88
Maximum:	539	379	591	459
No. of Sentences				
Mean:	27.43	12.67	25.58	14.66
Range:	6-68	4-32	10-66	2-43

Methodology

The researchers devised two analytic instruments in order to count certain variables in the writing sample. The first of these is attached as Appendix I. In addition to the basic information provided by the Board and coded as variables 1-7, it provides for the count of the total number of words, sentences, T-Units, finite and non-finite dependent clauses, and words in dependent structures in each paper analyzed (variables 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). These variables were used in the computation of T-Unit Scores. In addition, this instrument provided for counts of errors relating to punctuation of sentences (variables 10, 11, 12).

The second instrument is attached as Appendix II. It provides for a count of a number of superficial mechanical problems, especially in relation to punctuation, spelling, and various matters of standard usage, as well as a few items relating more immediately to rhetorical skills.

Four research assistants were trained in the techniques required to complete the instruments. They chose to work as a team, so that tests of inter-scorer reliability were unnecessary. The first assistant undertook the count of words, sentences and T-Units. The second completed the first instrument. The third completed the second instrument. The fourth checked all entries on both instruments.

On completion of the analysis, the scores were key-punched and entered into the computer in an SPSS system file. New variables were computed to provide for the T-Unit analysis, and frequencies and statistics were calculated for all variables. Finally, scattergrams were produced to provide a means of examining the correlations between the different measures to which the papers in the sample had been subjected.

SYNTACTIC MATURITY IN THE SAMPLE

The syntactic maturity of the writing in the sample was analyzed by computing scores for a number of measures of syntactic complexity relating to the minimal terminable unit, or "T-Unit." Basically, the T-Unit consists of an independent clause and all the dependent structures attached to it which would be grammatically incomplete if detached. The T-Unit is thus minimal because breaking it into smaller units would create fragments, and terminable because it is possible to stop at the end of the T-Unit without creating grammatical fragments. The validity of the T-Unit depends on the fact that as writing skills mature, writers become increasingly skilfull at subordinating and use more complex structures of modification generally. This fact is well established in the relevant research (Hunt 1965, 1970, Loban 1976), a fact which explains the frequent use of T-Unit analysis as a means of measuring the effects of sentence-combining instruction (Mellon 1967, O'Hare 1976, Kerek, Daiker and Morenberg 1977, Daiker, Kerek and Morenberg 1979). As for school-age children, the status study which shows typical levels of competence for all grade levels and for three ability levels within each grade is Loban 1976. This work, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, reports on the results of a massive, 13-year longitudinal study conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, and funded by the U.S. Office of Education. It is perhaps worth pointing out that all the other research investigating syntactic maturity in school-age children has turned up scores in or very near the range reported by Loban for the particular grade.

In computing T-Unit scores, we looked at three sets of scores: the average number of words per T-Unit, the average number of dependent clauses per T-Unit, and the total number of words in dependent units expressed as a percentage of the total number of words in T-Units. Obviously these measure slightly different aspects of syntactic complexity, and the strength of the correlations between them can reveal where the syntactic complexity is to be sought. For example, a strong correlation between the first and the third would mean that almost all the increasing complexity was due to increasing skill in subordination, whereas a weak correlation between the first and the second could mean that almost all the increase in number of words per T-unit was due to the use of more complicated structures of modification within independent clauses.

The results for the sample are reported in the three tables which follow. In view of the results, we have cited for comparison the norms given by Loban 1976 for the high, random and low groups not only for grade 7 and 8 but also for grade 9.

Average Number of Words per T-Unit (Means)					
	Carleton		Loban 1976		
Grade	Argument	Narrative	High	Random	Low
7	15.22	11.63	10.83	8.94	7.52
8	15.94	11.08	11.24	10.37	9.49
9			11.09	10.05	8.75

Average Number of Dependent Clauses per T-Unit (Means)					
	Carleton		Loban 1976		
Grade	Argument	Narrative	High	Random	Low
7	1.01	0.52	0.44	0.35	0.31
8	1.04	0.47	0.45	0.39	0.30
9			0.52	0.43	0.31

Total Number of Words in Dependent Units as a Percentage of Total Number of Words per T-Unit (Means)					
	Carleton		Loban 1976		
Grade	Argument	Narrative	High	Random	Low
7	53.04	37.64	26.03	17.95	13.47
8	51.44	38.27	29.71	26.30	22.38
9			26.86	26.67	21.62

It is scarcely necessary to comment on these results at all. Clearly, in each of the measures, the performance of the students in the Carleton sample is superior to the norm given by Loban. In most cases, the performance of the Carleton students in the narrative mode is superior to the High group in the Loban study; when it comes to the argumentative mode the scores are vastly superior. As a matter of fact, in all cases the scores for argument for students in the Carleton sample are higher than the norms for Loban's High group at the grade 12 level.

One aspect of these results, however, needs some explaining: the grade 8 students do not, as one might expect, invariably score higher than the grade 7 students. For the narrative writing, the grade students use more words as well as more dependent clauses per T-unit; in the argumentative pieces, the grade 7 writing shows a higher percentage of words in dependent structures.

The results for the narrative mode are less significant because, as mentioned previously (page 2), research studies have revealed that T-unit analysis is a less reliable measure for writing in this mode (Crowhurst and Piché). As to the drop in the argumentative writing, a glance at the Loban statistics is instructive. There, too, a decline is revealed, not between grades 7 and 8 but between grades 8 and 9. His study shows that development in syntactic complexity is not a steady upward climb: there are plateaus and temporary slight declines as well. The Carleton statistics may be revealing just such a plateau.

There is also the possibility that the grade 8 cohort is not as good. Certainly their in-class marks (page 2) might suggest this, as could some of the results of the error analysis to be described in the next

section.

Whatever the relative abilities of the grade 7 and 8 groups, however, the scores for both classes are extraordinarily high. What these results show very clearly is that, at the level of the sentence, the students in the sample can draw on skills far beyond the developmental norms for their age group. Two words of caution are necessary. The first is to reiterate that it would be invalid to extrapolate from this group of students to the whole grade 7 and 8 population. The second is that the highly developed skills demonstrated by these scores do not automatically carry over to overall writing ability. This point is to be discussed further within.

BASIC WRITING SKILLS IN THE SAMPLE

The analysis of the basic writing skill of the students whose work made up the sample was undertaken by means of counts of errors. The decision as to what types of errors to count was made partly on the basis of our own observations after a preliminary reading of some papers, partly on the basis of the skills emphasized in the Language Arts Core Curriculum for the grade 7 and 8 levels, and partly on the basis of our discussion of the latter with a member of the Program Department. Generally, we considered errors relating to punctuation, spelling, choice of pronoun forms, standard adverbial forms, dangling and misplaced modification, faulty parallelism, subject-verb agreement, standard verb forms and standard-verb complementation. More particularly, in the matter of punctuation we counted incidents of run-on sentences, comma splices, sentence fragments, failure to use a question mark for questions, confusion of its and it's, other errors in the use of apostrophes for contraction and possession, with an "other" category for all others. In the case of spelling we distinguished phonetic errors (e.g. thru for through), phonetic errors involving oral forms (e.g. cuz for because), confusion of homophones (e.g. to and too), faulty word division (such as alot for a lot), with again an "other" category for all errors not caught by this categorization.

The frequency of errors in the two "other" categories was far higher than in any of the remaining categories. Nevertheless the mean frequency of errors per paper was never greater than 5.33 for punctuation errors nor greater than 1.51 for spelling errors. More precisely, the statistics for these categories were as follows:

ERROR	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
"Other" Punctuation Errors				
Mean incidence:	4.59	2.85	5.33	3.37
Mode:	3.0	1.0	4.0	2.0
Range:	0-17	0-10	0-17	0-12
"Other" Spelling Errors				
Mean incidence:	1.4	1.51	1.5	1.4
Mode:	0	0	0	1.0
Range:	0-11	0-11	0-8	0-10

At first sight, the incidence of such errors (especially punctuation errors) may seem excessively high; and, as a matter of fact, the relatively higher incidence of errors in the narrative papers may well be due to sheer carelessness. Nonetheless, it can be said at once that on the whole the incidence of error in the papers examined was extremely low--so low, in fact, that although an analysis based on a computation of errors per number of words and number of sentences would have been more accurate, such a computation would have been needlessly expensive. In many cases the incidence of error was actually so low that the time spent annotating and counting errors was simply wasted. This is the case with phonetic spelling errors, hypercorrect pronoun forms (e.g. "between you and I," use of oblique case pronouns as subject complements, use of nonstandard adverbs (e.g. "drive slow") and substandard adverbial usages (e.g. "He plays hockey real well"), matters of subject-verb agreement where standard usage is divided (e.g. "None of the students are in any doubt"), and nonstandard complementation of verbs (e.g. "We intend running" for "We intend to run"). The percentage of papers in each mode and grade containing no instances of each of these is summarized below.

ERROR	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Phonetic Spelling % No instance:	98.1	99.2	98.8	100
Hypercorrect Pronouns % No instance:	98.1	100	100	99.6
Oblique Pronoun Subject Complements % No errors:	100	100	100	100
Nonstandard Adverbs % No instance:	98.1	99.2	100	96.7
Substandard Adverbs % No instance:	99.1	99.6	100	98.4
Subject-Verb Agreement (Divided Standard) % No instance:	99.1	100	100	100
Nonstandard Verb Complementation % No instance:	100	99.6	100	99.2

Of all the errors considered, only one had a relatively high frequency of error which remained constant despite the grade level and mode of the papers. That error was faulty word division, such as "alot" for "a lot." The percentage of papers in each group showing instances of this error was as follows:

FAULTY WORD DIVISION	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
% of Papers Showing Error:				
0 times:	66.7	68.1	70.9	70
1 time:	25.0	22.0	22.1	22.6
2 + times:	8.3	9.9	7.1	7.4

As is obvious, the frequency of this error does diminish slightly between grades 7 and 8. It might be worth stressing that the percentage of papers showing no examples of this error improves from better than two thirds in grade 7 (which is already good) to better than seven tenths. Of the other errors considered, there is only one in which there is any reason to suppose that the incidence of error decreases as students advance from Grade 7 to Grade 8. That error is the incidence of colloquially based phonetic spellings such as "cuz" for "because". The percentage of papers in each group showing instances of this error were as follows:

%of Papers Showing Error:	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
0 times:	88.9	98.8	95.3	96.3
1 time:	11.1	0.8	4.7	2.1
2 + times:	0	0.4	0	1.6

It will be noted that here the highest incidence of error is in fact concentrated in the Grade 7 narrative papers, where it may well represent a fully justified attempt to represent oral language.

In the case of four errors, there is no significant distribution by either grade or mode: all students are equally likely (or rather, equally unlikely) to make the error. Of these the most frequent error is the sentence fragment:

Sentence Fragments	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
% of Papers Showing Error				
0 times:	74.1	72.0	76.7	72.0
1 time:	15.7	22.4	17.4	17.7
2 + times:	10.2	5.5	5.8	10.3

In view of what is to be said later, it would be reasonable to assume that the causes of this error in the two modes are quite different. In the narrative mode, the fragmerts probably occur in circumstances where mature professional writers would consider using them. In the argumentative mode, however, the incidence of this error is more likely to be due to the kind of breakdown of skills which is to be discussed further within.

The other three errors which are not differentiated by either grade or mode are considerably less frequent. They are the confusion of its and it's, misplaced modifiers, and errors in subject-verb agreement due to attraction.

	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
its Confused with it's				
0 instances:	96.3	90.9	94.2	94.7
1 instance:	2.8	5.1	5.8	4.1
2 + instances:	0.9	3.9	0	1.2
Misplaced Modifiers				
0 instances:	93.5	94.5	94.2	95.5
1 instance:	6.5	4.7	5.8	4.5
2 + instances:	0	0.8	0	0
Subject-Verb Agreement (Attraction)				
0 instances:	99.1	97.6	96.5	97.5
1 instance:	0.9	2.4	3.5	2.5

In view of the occurrence of all four of these in academic and professional writing (which justifies the frequent discussion of them in handbooks of usage), it would seem reasonable to conclude that in these respects the students in the sample are performing at an adult or near-adult level.

The errors in the next group occur most frequently in narrative writing. These are the use of run-on sentences, comma splices,

substandard pronoun usage (e.g. "Stan and me went to Carbondale,") and the use of incorrect verb forms where standard usage is divided (e.g. "gotten" as the past participle of "get"; "lay" where the correct usage is "lie"). For these, the incidence of error by grade and mode is as follows:

	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Run-On Sentences				
% 0 times:	60.2	73.2	65.3	82.3
% 1 time:	22.2	18.1	15.1	11.1
% 2 + times:	17.8	8.6	18.7	6.6
Comma Splices				
% 0 times:	51.9	74.4	48.8	71.6
% 1 time:	20.4	15.4	23.3	16.5
% 2 + times:	27.8	11.3	28.1	11.9
Substandard Pronoun Usage				
% 0 times:	95.4	99.2	96.5	99.6
% 1 time:	4.6	0.8	2.3	0.4
Incorrect Verb Forms				
% 0 times:	95.4	99.2	98.8	99.6
% 1 time:	4.6	0.8	1.2	0.4

It is immediately obvious that the incidence of the last two is so low that they can be disregarded. So far as the first two are concerned, the high proportion of occurrences may be not so much an indicator of weak writing abilities as a tribute to the skill of the students in the sample when they are writing narrative: in this mode they use run-on sentences and comma splices, just as professional writers do.

It remains to discuss nine types of error which have a higher incidence in argumentative writing than in narrative writing, and four types of error which have a higher incidence in grade 8 than in grade 7. Two of those in the first group show very

striking differences: the use of they with indefinite singular antecedents (e.g. "If a parent wants to punish a child, they should ...) and the shift from a second-person to a third-person pronoun.

	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Indefinite Singular "They"				
% 0 instances:	98.1	61.4	98.8	65.4
% 1 instance:	1.9	23.6	1.2	21.8
% 2 + instances:	0	14.9	0	12.8

What needs to be said about this usage is that, though it is sometimes penalized in student writing, it is certainly standard; it is recognized by both the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's Third New International; and it serves a specific semantic function (noted in part by Webster's Third) which cannot be exactly expressed by any other form. Since this meaning is intrinsically far more likely in argumentative writing involving generalizations about unknown people, in this respect too it would be reasonable to suppose that the students in the sample are performing at a near-adult level.

The shift from second-person indefinite to third-person singular indefinite is equally clearly conditioned by the mode and the topic; however the usage is not standard. The percentage per paper of instances of this shift is as follows:

Shift from Indefinite Second to Third Person	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
0 instances:	95.4	70.9	96.5	67.5
1 instance:	4.6	27.2	2.3	27.6
2 + instances:	0	2.0	1.2	4.9

Both these types of error correlate strongly with a count made of a rhetorical feature which we labelled "Problems with Distancing": the latter, like the high frequency of indefinite they and the shifts from second to third person pronoun occurs with much greater frequency in the argumentative essays. These are all symptoms of the failure of rhetorical skill which is to be discussed further in the next section. For many students, the topic assigned for the argumentative essays was one which engaged their own feelings rather immediately. As a result, their writing moves somewhat uneasily between commentary which arises very directly out of their own thoughts and feelings and the more abstract and generalized level of discourse which they wish to aim for.

As for the other errors which have a higher incidence in the argumentative than in the expository essays, none is susceptible of easy explanation, but in most cases the difference between the two modes is not particularly striking. The errors and their frequency of occurrence are as follows.

ERROR	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Omission of Question Mark				
0 instances:	96.3	85.4	95.3	87.2
1 instance:	3.7	11.8	4.7	9.1
2 + instances:	0	2.8	0	3.7
Omission of Apostrophe (Contraction)				
0 instances:	92.6	81.5	90.7	86.4
1 instance:	6.5	13.0	5.8	8.2
2 + instances:	0.9	5.5	3.5	5.3
Confusion of Homophones				
0 instances:	76.9	69.3	74.4	67.5
1 instance:	13.0	16.1	18.6	19.3
2 + instances:	10.2	14.6	7.0	12.9

continued

ERROR	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Nominative for Oblique Pronouns				
0 instances:	99.1	97.2	100	97.5
1 instance:	0.9	2.8	0	2.5
Other Pronoun Case Errors				
0 instances:	98.1	95.7	97.7	95.9
1 instance:	1.9	3.9	2.3	4.1
2 + instances:	0	0.4	0	0
Faulty Parallelism (Verbs)				
0 instances:	91.7	88.6	94.2	90.9
1 instance:	8.3	9.8	4.7	7.4
2 + instances:	0	1.6	1.2	1.6
Faulty Parallelism (Other)				
0 instances:	96.3	94.9	98.8	90.1
1 instance:	2.8	4.7	1.2	9.1
2 + instances:	0.9	0.4	0	0.8

Although the difference between the narrative and argumentative papers is not very great for most of these errors, they all point to the same tendency: mechanical skills which are managed with great assurance in writing tasks which are well within the students' rhetorical command tend to break down somewhat, giving a higher incidence of mechanical error, when the same students attempt a writing assignment which is more difficult cognitively and is in a mode with which they are less familiar.

The last group of errors have a somewhat higher incidence in the grade 8 than in the grade 7 papers, as follows:

ERROR	7 Narr	7 Arg	8 Narr	8 Arg
Omission of Apostrophe (Possession)				
0 instances:	80.6	82.3	75.6	79.0
1 instance:	14.8	13.4	22.1	15.2
2 + instances:	4.7	4.3	2.3	5.7
Dangling Modifiers				
0 instances:	99.1	99.2	94.2	96.7
1 instance:	0.9	0.8	4.7	2.9
2 + instances:	0	0	1.2	0.4
Agreement Errors (Subject-Verb: Other)				
0 instances:	95.4	93.3	91.9	92.2
1 instance:	4.6	4.7	7.0	7.0
2 + instances:	0	2.0	1.2	0.8
Substandard Verb Forms				
0 instances:	98.1	99.2	96.5	96.7
1 instance:	1.9	0.8	1.2	3.3
2 + instances:	0	0	2.3	0

It is not possible to comment confidently on these errors, given the nature of the sample. They may be evidence of the kind of phenomenon already observed: aiming at a higher level intellectually, the grade 8 students may be betrayed by a failure of their mechanical skills. Conversely, these might be teacher-induced errors, caused by over-emphasis at the grade 8 level on skills already mastered at the grade 7 level. Two points do need to be made. The first is that given the nature of the sample, it is not possible to extrapolate from these results to the whole student population. The second is that the incidence of most of these errors remains low, so that the differences may not be statistically significant.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WRITING

In addition to the statistical analysis of syntactic features and grammatical errors, we subjected a subsample of the essays to a descriptive analysis, aimed at exploring and defining some of the rhetorical and cognitive features of the writing in the two grades in both modes. To this end, we selected initially a number of compositions written in both modes, from the range judged holistically to be average. This was later modified because of the great disparity discovered between the two modes, in that the argumentative pieces analysed were, on the whole, superior as judged holistically.

Narrative Writing

The narrative pieces immediately distinguished themselves by their rhetorical control. The basic formal pattern of the English narrative had been assimilated and mastered to the extent that students could even play with the form, use the patterns ironically, improvise. Students were able, first, to order the actions in a chronological sequence, and, second, develop the appropriate tempo for a story, i.e., build complexities slowly, then quicken the pace to reach a climax and swift resolution. Generally, the scene was set economically, introducing enough background material in the first two sentences to allow the reader to understand all the subsequent action. This last feature reveals not only a mastery of narrative form but a fairly high degree of

what Piaget calls "decentring." The students had enough psychological maturity to be able to identify with the point of view of a reader who knows less than they do.

There are other examples of psychological maturity. Students writing in the first person were able to keep a distance between the writer and the narrator, using that distance to comment ironically on the narrative. The presentation of other characters frequently showed a high degree of empathy and sensitivity. Sometimes, as in Essay A in Appendix III, the point of the story was psychological and moral discovery, the sudden insight of the narrator into the motivation and workings of another personality, with the resulting growth in values this implies. In this essay (and it is not unique) the writer has so far mastered the form of the narrative that he or she is able to use the writing as a means to generate as well as to communicate new insights about experience.

Argumentative Writing

All the features of the narrative writing--the organization, the sense of form, the control, the psychological decentring and perception--all these disappear in the argumentative mode. The argumentative essays are typically formless, incoherent, and, above all, awkward. When asked to rise above the concrete level of experience and deal with abstract ideas, these students' rhetorical control vanishes. The problem is not, then, that they are incapable of organizing, but that they cannot, at this stage, organize ideas.

Consider the following representative paragraph from Essay B in Appendix III. (The essay, in fact, was written by the same student who wrote the coherent, well-organized narrative, Essay A, and it is interesting to note that Essay A was holistically graded as average, while B was rated superior. In other words, the effectiveness of A was typical; the incoherence of B, superior.)

> Many child psychologists feel that striking a child is wrong. Some feel that physical action, forms a vengeance or hatred toward the parent. Statistics show that child abuse is growing. Does constant physical punishment rate as child abuse? I think it should. A child who has been hit time and time again, usually feels fear toward the parent. A parent-child relationship should not consist of fear or hatred. It should be on equal grounds. So how can a beaten child feel close to a parent?

The topic of this essay, as of all the argumentative essays, was "Should or Should Not Teenagers be Physically Punished?" In this paragraph, as in the essay as a whole, the writer has brought together an assortment of ideas, all relevant to the topic, but has not organized them into any kind of coherent whole. To do so, to find a unifying idea and then to organize the rest of the points according to this idea, the writer would have had to have been able to move to a higher level of abstraction, to conceive of a superordinate concept which could assimilate all the diverse points into a larger pattern. This is precisely what the students all seemed to find so difficult.

Essays C, D, E, and F show the same diffuseness as Essay B, while D, in addition, displays a rather typical avoidance strategy, designed to shift the ground of the argument so that the student can better handle the topic. This writer, after an attempt or two at generalization, brings the whole argument down to the level of anecdote, to the concrete and specific, by focusing on a single incident of physical abuse directed at a friend. The point is that these students cannot move with ease on the level of ideas. This inability, at this age, is consistent with the Piagetian scheme of cognitive development; children at the age of 12 and 13, according to Piaget, have just entered the stage of "formal operations," where they can begin to think logically, using abstract concepts.

The diagnosis of the writing is easy to make. Appropriate pedagogic responses, however, are more difficult. There is no

point either drawing the students' attention to their own awkwardness or avoiding the assignments which result in such awkward writing. The good teacher always assigns tasks of sufficient difficulty to challenge and stretch the students, treading a delicate balance between assigning what is completely beyond their capacity on the one hand, and taking the safe and easy route on the other. To strike this balance, however, teachers need to know much more than they do about the pattern of development in writing, when growth spurts can be expected, and what kinds of growth--cognitive, psychological, rhetorical--can be anticipated. It is to this end, the articulation of such developmental patterns, that we are directing our research.

CORRELATIONS

As a result of this work and the work completed earlier under Mr. O'Riordan's direction, four sets scores relating to the writing abilities of the students in the sample are now available: the in-class scores, the holistic scores, the T-Unit scores and the error counts. As the last part of this project, we examined the strength of the correlation between each of these scores individually. In view of the very low count for most of the errors, we computed the sum of the scores for sentence fragments, comma splices, run-on sentences, other punctuation errors and other spelling errors.

In only one case did a somewhat strong correlation appear: the in-class scores correlated positively with the holistic scores ($r = 0.485$, $r^2 = 0.235$, $p > .00001$). In none of the other cases was their any evidence of a valid positive or negative correlation.

These results justify a number of comments. The first is that, by and large, the team of holistic scorers rated the students in the sample much as their teachers did. In view of the great rapidity of holistic scoring, this correlation could be used to justify using it more extensively throughout the Board.

A second point is that (contrary to the results found by Stewart, forthcoming), the team of holistic scorers were <u>not</u> influenced by mechanical errors, or at least not by the particular mechanical errors computed.

Thirdly, whatever it was that formed the basis of the holistic scorers' and in-class teachers' results, this was apparently not those aspects of syntactic skill that are measured by T-Unit analysis. The latter must be regarded, then, as having its own validity as a comparative measure.

Finally, the absence of any correlation between the mechanical errors computed and the T-Unit scores suggests that students are equally likely (equally slightly likely) to make mechanical errors whatever their level of syntactic maturity. This fact may well relate to the earlier observation that the incidence of mechanical error seems to increase with the greater cognitive difficulty of the task and the unfamiliarity of the mode.

CONCLUSIONS

It remains to point out the relevance of this study to the evaluation of the Language Arts Core Curriculum. There are two points that need to be emphasized.

The first is that those aspects of writing ability which are addressed in the Core Curriculum are, for the students in the sample, simply non-problems. Of course, it is possible that the high level of mechanical skill evinced by the students in the sample is due to the concentration on such matters in the Core Curriculum. However there is some strong evidence against this possibility in the results presented: both the increase in errors at the grade 8 level and the significantly higher incidence of errors in the argumentative papers suggest that something else is involved. Almost certainly the results of this study merely confirm what every study of the effectiveness of teaching grammar has shown: teaching grammar either systematically, or functionally, in relation to particular errors as they occur, has never been shown either to improve writing ability or to decrease the incidence of errors. In short, the Core Curriculum seems to imply that almost all the time devoted to writing instruction at these levels should be devoted to mechanical skills which, for the majority of the students in the group, are not problems at all, or are problems only when the writing task is intrinsically difficult or relatively unfamiliar. Again, these results confirm what other research has suggested: success in mechanical skills is contingent on success in writing generally, and not vice versa. To put it another way, when the students can handle the writing exercise, the mechanical skills virtually look

after themselves. When they cannot, the skills break down as well. There is every reason to suppose that as the students develop to the point where they can handle the more difficult tasks, their earlier mastery of the mechanical skills will recover automatically. And, certainly, there is every reason to suppose that teaching directed at mechanical skills will not help them to develop to the higher level needed to handle the more difficult tasks.

The second point is that there is no direction or advice offered in the Core Curriculum as to how teachers might address those problems that are real problems for the students in the sample: the problem of how to develop and defend an argument, and especially an argument with a certain level of abstraction. It is with this topic that both the breakdown of mechanical skills and the failure in rhetoric are most apparent. It should be possible to develop teaching strategies to help classroom teachers to address these problems.

There is, to be sure, some resource material developed by Board personnel addressing these issues, and what we have seen of this material is intelligently formulated and pedagogically sound. Furthermore, on the basis of the writing samples we analysed, we can infer that many teachers have developed effective strategies for teaching writing on their own, based on their own intuitions as writers and classroom teachers. The Language Arts Curriculum itself, however, deals with none of this and, because of its emphasis, conveys a very distorted and misleading image of what writing instruction should be.

Our tentative conclusion, then, is that in some fundamental respects the parts of the Language Arts Core Curriculum which deals with writing at the Grade 7 and Grade 8 level need to be rethought. They seem to us to place excessive emphasis on matters which are not particularly problematic, and are in any case secondary. They fail to address the much more fundamental writing problems that appear in students in these grades.

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Appendix I

Carleton Writing Project

Preliminary Score Sheet

Board I.D.: _____

1. Case I.D.	____	____	____	____
2. Student Number			____	____
3. Grade Level				____
4. Scorer			____	____
5. Mode				____
6. In-School Mark			____	____
7. Holistic Mark			____	____
8. Total Number of Words	____	____	____	____
9. Total Number of Sentences		____	____	____
10. Total Number of Run-Ons			____	____
11. Total Number of Comma Splices			____	____
12. Total Number of Fragments			____	____
13. Total Number of Conjoined Independent Clauses with Ellipted Subject			____	____
14. Total Number of T-Units		____	____	____
15. Total Number of Words in Dialogue	____	____	____	____
16. Number of Finite Dependent Clauses		____	____	____
17. Number of Non-Finite Dependent ING			____	____
18. Number of Non-Finite Dependent TO			____	____
19. Number of Non-Finite Dependent EN			____	____
20. Number of Non-Finite Dependent Other			____	____
21. Total Number of Words in All Dependent Structures	____	____	____	____

Appendix II

CASE I.D. ____ ____ ____

CARD I.D. ____

EXCLUDE DIALOGUE FROM ANALYSIS

Punctuation

1. Missed Question Mark _____ : ____
2. Missed Apostrophe (Possession) _____ : ____
3. Missed Apostrophe (Contraction) _____ : ____
4. Confusion of its and it's _____ : ____
5. Other punctuation errors _____ : ____ ____

Spelling

6. Confusion of homophones (to/too) _____ : ____
7. Phonetic errors (thru) _____ : ____
8. Colloquial phonetic spelling (cuz) _____ : ____
9. Word division errors (alot) _____ : ____
10. Other spelling errors _____ : ____ ____

Pronoun Case

11. Hypercorrect (between you and I) _____ : ____
12. Oblique Subj. Compl. (it was him) _____ : ____
13. Oblique Subject (Stan and me went) _____ : ____
14. Other errors in pronoun case _____ : ____
15. Nominative Non-Subject (he hit he and she) _____ : ____

Pronoun Use

16. They with Indefinite Singular Antecedents _____ : ____
17. Second to Third Indefinite (you . . . he) _____ : ____
18. Distancing problems _____ : ____
19. Reflexive _____ : ____

Reference

20. Unclear _____ : ____
21. Vague _____ : ____ ____

Adverbs

22. Nonstandard _____ : ____
23. Substandard _____ : ____

Modification

24. Dangling _____ : ____
25. Misplaced _____ : ____

Faulty Parallel

26. Verbs _____ : ____
27. Other _____ : ____

Sub/Vb agr.

28. Usage _____ : ____

29. Attraction _____ : ____

30. Real _____ : ____

Verb forms

31. Substandard (I seen) _____ : ____

32. Disputed (gotten/lay) _____ : ____

33. Complementation _____ : ____

34. Usage (who) _____ : ____

35. Clause indenting _____ : ____

APPENDIX III

Essay A

"You Played a Great Game Connie!"

The nerves in my stomach were jiggling around like butterflies. Today was the big game and I was starting! When the coach told me I was starting center, I couldn't believe it! I tried to convince him to start Elsa but he wouldn't listen. I implored him "Don't you want to win? Don't you want to be state champions?" He nodded. "Then why start me?" Coach brown looked shocked at my tone.

"Listen Connie, I'm the coach and what I say goes!" How well I remembered those words. Even though it didn't seem so, I cherished the thought of starting center.

"Hey Connie!" It was Elsa, our star player. I turned around, not wanting to face her. Would she be mad or jealous or maybe she would be just plain sarcastic, her knowing that she outranked me as a player. "Connie, wait up! Let's go and get changed into our uniforms. You're starting you know." I couldn't tell if there was any sarcasm in her voice. Oh well, I thought to myself, maybe if I am seen with Elsa, people would notice me. It was Elsa, not I, who got all the guys. It was Elsa, not I, who got elected to all the offices and who won the awards. Elsa was somebody and I was nobody. I hurried to catch up with her, but her six foot body had already reached the locker room. As I opened the door the loud voices of our John Leer College Basketball Team were blasting out our school cheer.

Go John Leer Go!
Beat' em!
Bust'em!
That's our custom!
Go John Leer Go!

It was hardly appropriate for basketball but we loved it.

The team rushed out on the court. The starting girls set up for the jump. I missed it, as usual on the very first whistle.

I was taken off for Elsa. As the game progressed it was very close. Finally, with one minute to go, it was tied, 24 all. The coach called a sub and put me in for Elsa. I decided then and there to win the game. I got the ball and dribbled as I have never dribbled before. I went up for a lay up and scored! I was filled with joy until I noticed the grim faces of my team mates. I glanced up at the scoreboard. Two points went up - for the other team! I scored on the wrong basket! Tears sprang to my eyes as I met the angry stares of my friends. Then Elsa came up and said "You played a great game.'" Then I knew why everyone liked her.

She cared.

Essay B

Physical Punishment

The question of pysical punishment towards adolescents has two strong sides. If a child has been extremely bad, many parents face a difficult time. Should they strike the child, hoping to scare him into believing how wrong he was, or are verbal put-downs and reprimands the better idea?

Many child psychologists feel that striking a child is wrong. Some feel that physical action, forms a vengeance or hatred toward the parent. Statistics show that child abuse is growing. Does constant physical punishment rate as child abuse? I think it should. A child who has been hit time and time again, usually feels fear toward the parent. A parent-child relationship should not consist of fear or hatred. It should be on equal grounds. So how can a beaten child feel close to a parent?

Many parents were brought up with a heavy hand. They were taught that any sin would be punished with belts, straps or just a stinging slap of the hand. Often, adults claim that when they

were young, they didn't dream of doing the things that go on today. Did the "heavy hand" routine work? Maybe it did then but not now. Times have changed. And so have teenagers. Most of the cases that I know of (spankings or slapping) just cause the want for revenge.

Physical punishment is being strongly debated. My friends and I are against it. A good parent can control his child with more effective ways than physical punishments. So come on parents, give us kids a chance to live a happy and healthy life.

Essay C

Physical Punishment of Young Teenagers

I think young teenagers should not be physically punished because when they were small (4-7) they probably had enough spankings, as they did not know what they were doing. However when a teenager is spanked on the rear end like a regular five year old for an accident such as knocking over a vase or breaking a glass it could be harmful to the teenager.

There are other ways of punishment that could be used. Like grounding (not letting him or her go outside after school or taking away his or her bicycle for a period of time). Making him work all weekend instead of playing football or baseball would be better than slapping him in the rear end.

The parent or parents should take into account the degree of seriousness of what the person did. If what the person did was very severe, measures should be taken to find an adequate punishment for the offense. But if it is a minor accident the punishment should only be a verbal reprimand.

I believe these are the steps that should be taken instead of physical punishment both at home and at school, and if these measures are taken it may improve the relationship between the

teenager and the parents rather than worsen it if they get belted for every thing they do wrong.

Essay D

Should or Shouldn't Young Teenagers be Punished Physically

I don't think young teenagers should be punished physically. I think that the best punishment would be to be sent to bed or grounded from going outside.

The reason why I don't like teenagers to be punished physically is because I'm a teenager, I don't like to be hit or shoved around because it doesn't do any good. When I get slapped I usually laugh or giggle. It doesn't hurt very much to be slapped. Another reason why I don't like it is because most parents don't slap they punch and really abuse their kids. I once had a friend, and one day she was bike riding, she had another friend with her and her friends chain fell off the bike. They got it fixed by my friends father and they said, they were going bike riding again. Her father said OK and they left. That night she had choir and her parents knew it so, she didn't go home, she went straight to choir. After choir ended they were on their way home and my friends father came racing down the road. He stopped and told her to put the bike in the truck and to get in. She did that and when they got home her father told her to take the bike down from the truck and put it beside the house. As she was taking the bike out of the truck her father punched her, and hit her with the belt. She had bruises on her arms and legs for over a week.

So you see, this is why I don't think that young teenagers should be punished physically.

Essay E

Physical Punishment

Should or should not physical punishment be used towards teenagers?

Definitely not! We're old enough to know what we should or shouldn't do! I'll admit that I sometimes stray from my parents' laws, but physical punishment can have bad effects on children of any age. It can influence them into using the same treatment towards others, or it may make them resentful towards their parents, and less open about problems they have for fear of getting hit or slapped. Physical punishment should not be allowed in schools either, because it can be a terrible crush to the child's ego and very embarassing for him/her. Adolescents are too old to be hit or slapped for they can realize their wrong-doings without such treatment.

Quite often it is necessary to use physical punishment on teenagers like myself. Just telling a kid not to do this or that literally goes in one ear and out the other. However, if Mom slaps you when you do something, special attention is drawn, and what she says actually registers. I'm definitely glad Dad hit me a few times when I started to smoke, because grounding me, or cutting my allowance, or giving me no dessert wouldn't have carried as much weight. The fear of being hurt was the only thing worse than being ridiculed by my friends. I'm glad now, as I realize that Dad's hand was the only thing that saved me. I know that a lot of other kids really mind being grounded, or what have you, and they never learn. Although I hate it, I have to admit that a good spanking every once in a while is a good reminder to keep me in line.

My actual opinion comprises a bit of both these sides. In some cases, the only way to get through to a stubborn know-it-all teenager, is with the birch rod, just an exaggeration, of course,

but a good example. However, in general, most of us can realize our fault by talking it out.

Essay F

Should Punishment be Allowed

No I do not think that young teenagers should be punished physically. As the famous saying goes "This is going to hurt me more than it is going to hurt you. I bet it does, it hurts us way more!!!

When fathers beat their sons some of the sons think that it is an act of hatred. This is because some of them run away, others have a hatred for their fathers the rest of their lives.

Also when the father beats or spanks his son will beat his son because his father beat him. Also he does it in even more hatred for his father! The father should not spank his son to a degree it all depends on what he does.

Not even the teacher should be able to punish the students, no matter what they do!!!

First you should warn the student, the second time you should yell at the student. The third time the teacher should throw the student out of the class rather than belt him or her!!!

Many teachers are old fashion and hit the student before giving him or her a warning. They hit you and move you by force, this should not be allowed.